

ARROWS OF THE DAWN.

NO. 1.

THE UNEMPLOYED.

“*Laborare est orare.*”

323.2.4

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The question how to deal with the unemployed has once more become urgent, owing to the influx of tramps which we are experiencing, and with which we have as yet no organized means of coping.

The final solution of this social difficulty can only be accomplished by the nation as a whole, but the nation as a whole is as yet too torpid, and will have to be roused to action, and shown the way to act, by the example of smaller bodies; again in the final solution of the difficulty the nation will have to cooperate with the local authority of township and county and State. Can we do nothing here this winter to mitigate the evil in this county?

The circumstances of the time, the social institutions under which we are most of us content to live without questioning them, have produced armies of unemployed who surge up before us one winter after another. There seem to be four main causes of the growth of this social nuisance. The first is to be found in the present industrial system with its principle of *laissez faire*, of each for himself and the devil take the hindmost, with its false conception of what it misnames natural laws, with its sacrifice of the decency and health and pleasure of the lives of its workers so only that greater material profit may be attained.

A second cause has been found by men like Galton and Siemens in "the rapidity and vast scale upon which science and invention are being applied, with the consequent demand for greater skill, vigor and enterprise among employers and laborers alike, which throws upon the weak a strain too great to be met."

A third cause is the increased congregation of men in our cities, where all are exposed to the physical exhaustion consequent on city life, and the weaker succumb to the demoralizing atmosphere of the saloon and similar hells.

A fourth and too little noticed cause seems to lie in the increased intellectual education of the present day, which has unfitted many for the simpler life of manual work of their fathers, without enabling them to earn a better or a healthier living in other ways. In the city of Naples a common stevedore earns more than a man who can read and write three languages. Fortunately we are beginning to see that the merely intellectual faculties are not the only ones in man requiring education, and that of late years we have given too much prominence to their culture to the detriment of man as a whole.

From these joint causes we are now confronted with an increasing number of that saddest class of men, those who have lost the capacity to do an honest day's work, and of that other class, hardly less sad, who are willing to work but whom the inequality of fortune has deprived of their chance.

The majority of us are afraid of socialism, and even of the thin end of its wedge, which is seen in the providing of labor by public authority for those who can find none in the ordinary way; we shrink from the possible financial consequences of such action, and yet we are responsible for the social and industrial system, which has rendered such action necessary. For it is our system of free business competition, —of *laissez faire*,—under which capital and managing intellect take the lion's share of the product of the world, leaving the crumbs to those who do the manual work, which has produced the growing discontent of the masses; with greater freedom and more intellectual training than they had a century ago, they are beginning to chafe under a system which produces two such absurdities as the million-

aire and the pauper, and which keep providing us with crowds of the employed.

The increase of the latter, the criminal acts of many of them, the anarchical tendency of their armies, the tramp at our doors, who on occasion becomes a thief or a murderer, all demand that society, that is that you and I and all rational persons, should devise means of ridding the world of this nuisance. That the nuisance is an intolerable one it is unnecessary to show to anyresident in the States or in Western Europe, that is in those countries most under the rule of modern industrial organization.

The old method of dealing with the distress of the poorer classes by means of charity was suitable to an aristocratic state of society, ruled by the landowner and the church. We of the newer democracy require other safer and broader methods.

And now who are the unemployed, and how can we deal with them? They form a motley crowd made up chiefly of four classes:

1. Idlers who do not want to work, but to loaf, and who are nearly akin to the professional beggar.
2. Artizans who through misfortune or intemperance, or the reduction of the number of men employed in their industry, are out of work.
3. Many who have no skill to do finer work, and no physique to enable them to compete in the heavier kinds of labor.
4. The most important class is perhaps made up of those who are willing to work and able bodied, but have no skill in their hands to do any but the simplest kind of manual work.

The common opinion that 90 per cent of the unemployed will refuse offered work is not in accordance with facts, at least in the larger industrial centres. In Boston last winter

out of 929 who applied for work at the woodyard 723 availed themselves of the work offered. For our own sake we must provide work for those who will work. I say for our own sake because the presence of a number of unemployed among us is a source of danger and corruption which we cannot tolerate, because at last in this century the truth is being recognized of the solidarity of society, and men are beginning to see that the disgrace of any one class of their fellows keeps back the progress which society could otherwise make, and acts on the body social as surely as a diseased limb acts on the body of the individual man. It is the majority made up of those who have no kind of special skill in their hands which is the most difficult to deal with. There is, however, plenty of useful work which wants doing in supplying our towns and country districts with better roads, with better drainage and with better supplies of water, in which this class of labor could be employed. For those who lack skill to work, what system remains but to teach them how to do something? We can hardly be losers by so doing. The tramps and the unemployed live upon us as parasites by begging or stealing; if we can make them do some useful work, even if it should not be equal in amount to what could be done by more skillful men for the same pay, we shall gain in the end even in mere economy. There are three ways of dealing with the class before us; the first is to expel them from our borders, but this too much resembles the action of a man who dumps his refuse on his neighbor's plot and we have suffered enough from the barbarous short-sightedness of such policy during the last year.

A second measure is to imprison them under the vagrancy laws; but in this way they have to be supported by us, and we cannot imprison them for life.

The third and only statesmanlike way is to organize and use what labor we can get out of them, to compel them to

work for the sustenance with which we provide them, encouraging some of them to steadier habits, and committing to jail those who refuse assistance under the conditions which we offer them.

To carry out this plan necessitates some scheme of public work, together with an efficient organization for carrying it out, and means to keep it going.

In undertaking such work we must necessarily pay less than the average wages of the district for the least skilled labor, and the general conditions on which work is provided must be such as to prevent the attraction of applicants from other parts of the State.

Let us join then in consenting to the burden of taxation necessary to carry out some useful public work, and let us look to it that the money which we all pay toward this object is rightly and economically spent on it; and when I say economically, I mean always with the condition in view that we have to find work for so much of the least skilled labor. Let us once more accept the policy on which the greatness of nations is founded, of being willing to do more than is requisite for our own short day, and to help in preparing better conditions of life on which the next step in the progress of humanity shall be laid, trusting that public duty and private convenience—that the good of the whole body politic and that of the individual—are really in harmony and that it is through our want of hearing that we cannot perceive their accord.

Having then recognized the necessity and the economy of dealing in some way with the unemployed, let us consider the best means of so doing. It has been found by experience that the only way is for each locality to deal with a small number of the class in question, and so to prevent the aggregation of crowds and armies. It has also been found that the organization of labor for some months, for a few hundred men, is not impossible to a small com-

munity, even if that labor is not such as would be demanded apart from the emergency. For instance, two hundred men can be provided with work for four months at a cost not exceeding an average of \$10 to each of two thousand rate payers.

In many eastern cities the necessity has been found of combination among the more intelligent and independent section of the community, in order to formulate the better part of public opinion, and to force it on local authorities, who are so often chosen for the chance of "spoils" and who have rarely the public benefit at heart. Such citizens might also, as has been found practical in the East, manage the associated charities of the district, which would be a means of great help in dealing with those seeking assistance. Among other methods of disbursing charitable assistance would come the means of feeding and lodging a number of men economically; this can of course be done at a much less cost than that at which individuals can provide for themselves; the reward of labor would, in this case, naturally be paid partly in food and lodging. It has been found possible to provide meals for five cents in Eastern cities, and that without loss. 15 cents would suffice here.

As to the cost of public work undertaken for the benefit of the unemployed, it has been asserted that for every 30 cents' worth of work done \$1 is paid. Where such has been the case it has been due to bad organization and direction of the work done. In order to controvert such a statement I will quote an instance from last winter's experience:

"Public work has, in a number of cases, been pushed or anticipated in virtue of the relief committee assuming the difference between the emergency cost and the normal cost. The very ingenious method of setting afloat in wages a considerable sum at a comparatively small outlay by the committee seems to have been peculiar to Boston. The Citizens Relief Committee of that city arranged for the

construction of seventeen sewers, which would not otherwise have been constructed till spring. The relief laborers received \$1.50 for nine hours' work, and were employed in weekly shifts. The city paid the contractors the normal summer cost; and the committee made up the difference between that and the actual cost, guaranteeing the contractor a profit of 15 per cent. upon the labor cost. The deficit which the committee paid and which was mainly due to unforeseen difficulties of construction, amounted to \$9660. It enabled contracts, amounting to \$32,421, to be executed during the period of greatest exigency, and thus set afloat \$24,168 in wages." The loss in this case was not of 70 cents on the dollar, as is often asserted to be unavoidable, but of 30 cents.

The first thing to do after determining what work to undertake, and how to raise the necessary fund, is to establish a bureau of labor, to which every tramp seeking work is to be referred. This bureau must have an intimate connection with the police authorities of the district, so that under the vagrancy law any one who refuses the proffered work can at once be confined in jail.

In the future, penal settlements will have to be organized to which this class must be sent, and where they shall be compelled to work, till after having attained certificates of good behavior, and habits of industry, many of them will again emerge into the world of their fellows. In such settlements the inmates must be given the means of acquiring skill in handicraft, so that they may not once more issue out to swell the number of the unskilled. For the remainder, work must be provided by the labor bureau, of course at wages less than those current in the district.

There are many who are afraid of providing labor and payment for the unemployed by public authority. Let them be reassured that in this case the cost of the work proposed can be calculated before hand, and that the

public is rendering itself responsible only for a definite amount. When the first experiment has been made a local referendum can confirm or change the policy of the future.

As examples of what has been done by other cities, I would refer those interested to the report by Mr. Closson in the Quarterly Journal for Economies of last year. They will there find that the policy I advocate was adopted in Boston, Lowell, Cambridge, Lawrence, Providence, Cincinnati, New York and many other cities. In many of them there was hearty co-operation between the charitable organizations and the public authorities, and there is no doubt of the ground gained by those who maintain that it is no longer to charity alone than we must look for the cure of this social evil. One indispensable condition of success of some of the works undertaken seems to have been, as we should expect, that the management and direction of it shall be efficient, much more efficient than that which we generally tolerate in the expenditure of public money. The work must be managed by people who have their hearts in it, and who care for its efficiency, and also for the encouragement of habits of industry in those employed.

Such are the means of meeting the present emergency; for the moment the pressing question is not how the present organization of society is responsible for the existence of the unemployed. But the question will be asked later, and steps must be taken by the legislature to avoid the continued increase of this class among us. These will probably consist in a more enlightened view of education, adding to the schools in which our youth are educated in book-knowledge, other schools where they may acquire skill with their hands; and last and most important there must be a general levelling up of the standard of living, so that it shall be almost impossible for lads to grow up and be content to fall into the habits of the loafer and the tramp.

Among the means of attaining such ends, clubs have been found very useful, where men can find amusement and social intercourse of a kind different from that supplied to them by the saloon and similar places of resort, which in smaller towns are often the only places open to them. And for dealing with the unemployed who may still remain, while the standard of life is being raised, and society is being modified so as to eliminate this class, there will have to be provided by local authorities in conjunction with the State, I quote the words of an eminent writer on this subject:

1. *Employment bureaus* distributed over county and city districts with investigation so organized that it can do its work before it is too late to manage the applicants.

2. *Adequate graduated work tests* which shall convince the public that the applicant has been taken fairly at his word, and offered what he claims to be seeking,—work. Such work tests separate the *beat* in every variety from those for whom something may be done, because of the will to do something.

3. *Trade schools* (agriculture included) to which these can be sent who have accepted the tests and proved their *willingness*, but lack skill and capacity.

4. *Places of discipline and training* (labor colonies and work shops) to which those who are able, but deliberately refuse to work, can be sent to a prison, where they shall be kept until they prove their willingness and ability to earn an honest livelihood."

In considering how to deal with the unemployed here and now, we can hardly fail to remember the demands which labor made last summer on the occasion of some of its members being thrown out of work, and the constant recurrence of strikes, with the consequent disorganization of labor, which is responsible for at least some of the unemployed.

Regarding Europe and the United States, the mater-

ial production of the world has never been so great in proportion to its inhabitants, and yet there have probably never been so large a proportion of people living on the verge of want.

Equality of share in the world's material possessions is now a cry of the past. Such equality is as chimerical as equality of talents. What the masses now demand, and demand justly, is greater equality of opportunity in life. That each man should have an opportunity given him of earning a decent living, and of leading the life of an honest citizen is within the reach of practical politics, if politicians were as a class devoted to the good of the State, instead of to their own profit and aggrandizement.

It is not charity that the masses now demand but the right to better opportunities of life, and to a greater share in the annual production of the world.

Few will question that saying of Adam Smith that "there is no country in which the whole annual producers are employed in maintaining the industries. The idle everywhere consume a great part of it; and according to the different proportions in which it is annually divided between these two different orders of people, its ordinary or average value must either annually increase or diminish."

There is at present a school of economists who have caught up the phrases but not the sense of modern science, and who talk of the *survival of the fittest* and of letting *Nature* have her way. They forget that Nature has attained to self consciousness in man, and that man is already living under laws written and unwritten which he has made according to the measure of his wisdom, and that these have just as much and no more the authority of Nature than those which increased wisdom would put in their place. Opposed to these rather antediluvian thinkers there has been growing up in late years a consensus of opinion not only in the "masses"

but in the more intelligent part of the so-called "classes," that the *fittest* who *survive* under the present social and commercial system are not at all the fittest from the point of view of nobility of character or of usefulness to the race.

To quote a modern writer: "Of two plants or animals that will survive which is fittest to endure the conditions in which both exist. The question which man shall survive depends upon the conditions under which men struggle for survival," and it is the consciousness of man on the one hand and the limits imposed on him by the laws of unconscious matter on the other, which now determine these conditions.

According to the law of nature, the man who is best suited by the conditions of the country and the society he lives in will be best fitted to succeed.

In a nation of marauders, then, who live by spoliation and the sword, the fittest to survive would be a different type of man from him who gets the first place in a nation of traders, where fierceness and strength of arm are less called for than tenacity and clearness of head.

It thus appears that when we say our poor are poor because they are not fitted to gain wealth we mean that they are not "fit" to gain wealth under the conditions of life now existing. But under different conditions of life they might succeed.

If, then, the present conditions of life are right the poor are wrong; but if the present conditions are not right, the poor are *wronged*.

Therefore it seems that this theory of the survival of the fittest is no answer to our indictment against society. It proves nothing except that if the poor are unworthy they are unworthy. The question, are they unworthy, or is it the arrangement of society that is unworthy, has still to be answered."

That few of us have sufficient sympathy with the masses

of those with whom we do not come in personal contact to realize how hard their struggle is; that still fewer have sufficient imagination to picture to themselves any other state of society than that under which they now live, does not make a better state less desirable or even much less attainable, and it would be well for the obscurantists of the present day to remember that in feudal times it would have been quite as difficult for them to imagine the conditions of life under the present system of industrialism which they defend, as it is for them now to believe in any more *social* state in which supply and demand shall not rule man, but man shall by his conscious reason control the supply and distribution of wealth, and that on a basis of pure economy; for *economy* means the right ordering of the house, and as such demands the right ordering of the material basis of life, upon which alone higher possibilities are open to the race, and upon which alone the higher arts can once more flourish among us.

PROSPICE.

MONTECITO, JAN. 13th, 1895.

To those who are interested in the question of how to deal with the unemployed, may I suggest a perusal of the following articles, my indebtedness to which I hereby acknowledge:

Future Problem of Charity and the Unemployed by J. E. Brooks in the *Annals of the Academy of Political and Social Science*, July, 1894.

The Unemployed in American Cities, by Closson, in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, January and July, 1894.

The unemployed, by John Burns, published by the Fabian Society, 1893.

